

Strategy Research Project International Fellow

Collective Defense of the Baltic States: A SOF Beginning

by

Colonel Darius Jauniskis
Lithuania Armed Forces



United States Army War College
Class of 2012

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REPORT DOCUMENTATION PAGE				Form Approved OMB No. 0704-0188	
Public reporting burden for this collection of information is estimated to average 1 hour per response, including the time for reviewing instructions, searching existing data sources, gathering and maintaining the data needed, and completing and reviewing this collection of information. Send comments regarding this burden estimate or any other aspect of this collection of information, including suggestions for reducing this burden to Department of Defense, Washington Headquarters Services, Directorate for Information Operations and Reports (0704-0188), 1215 Jefferson Davis Highway, Suite 1204, Arlington, VA 22202-4302. Respondents should be aware that notwithstanding any other provision of law, no person shall be subject to any penalty for failing to comply with a collection of information if it does not display a currently valid OMB control number. PLEASE DO NOT RETURN YOUR FORM TO THE ABOVE ADDRESS.					
1. REPORT DATE (DD-MM-YYYY) 20-03-2012		2. REPORT TYPE Strategy Research Project		3. DATES COVERED (From - To)	
4. TITLE AND SUBTITLE Collective Defense of the Baltic States: A SOF Beginning				5a. CONTRACT NUMBER	
				5b. GRANT NUMBER	
				5c. PROGRAM ELEMENT NUMBER	
6. AUTHOR(S) Colonel Darius Jauniskis				5d. PROJECT NUMBER	
				5e. TASK NUMBER	
				5f. WORK UNIT NUMBER	
7. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) Colonel Michael Slojkowski Department of Military Strategy, Planning, & Operations				8. PERFORMING ORGANIZATION REPORT NUMBER	
9. SPONSORING / MONITORING AGENCY NAME(S) AND ADDRESS(ES) U.S. Army War College 122 Forbes Avenue Carlisle, PA 17013				10. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S ACRONYM(S)	
				11. SPONSOR/MONITOR'S REPORT NUMBER(S)	
12. DISTRIBUTION / AVAILABILITY STATEMENT Distribution: A					
13. SUPPLEMENTARY NOTES					
14. ABSTRACT Twenty years ago the three Baltic States of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia regained their independence at relatively the same time. All of them became members of NATO in 2004. They also joined the European Union that same year. Despite their membership in the powerful military alliance of NATO and their association with the EU, the threat from Russia remains. Continuous cyber attacks and information operations, clear political messages, and other actions from the "Big neighbor" show that Russia has not abandoned her ambition to control this region. Will the three Baltic States repeat their historic failure to build a united defense against an aggressive military invasion as in the 1940s? Can these tiny Baltic States set aside separate agendas and build a united, well coordinated, and capable resistance against the genuine threat of a powerful adversary? This Strategic Research Project (SRP) argues that the threat from Russia persists. Consequently, Baltic States must build a robust collective defense to counter this threat. This cooperative defense should begin with a collective Baltic Special Operations Force trained and equipped to thwart Russian aggression in the region.					
15. SUBJECT TERMS Lithuania, Russia Threat, Military Cooperation in the Baltic States, Russia Plans and Actions, Baltic Region					
16. SECURITY CLASSIFICATION OF:			17. LIMITATION OF ABSTRACT UNLIMITED	18. NUMBER OF PAGES 30	19a. NAME OF RESPONSIBLE PERSON
a. REPORT UNCLASSIFIED	b. ABSTRACT UNCLASSIFIED	c. THIS PAGE UNCLASSIFIED			19b. TELEPHONE NUMBER (include area code)

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

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Colonel Darius Jauniskis
Lithuania Armed Forces

Colonel Michael Slojkowski
Project Adviser

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U.S. Army War College
CARLISLE BARRACKS, PENNSYLVANIA 17013

ABSTRACT

AUTHOR: Colonel Darius Jauniskis
TITLE: Collective Defense of the Baltic States: A SOF Beginning
FORMAT: Strategy Research Project
DATE: 20 March 2012 WORD COUNT: 5,569 PAGES: 30
KEY TERMS: Lithuania, Russia Threat, Military Cooperation in the Baltic States, Russia Plans and Actions, Baltic Region
CLASSIFICATION: Unclassified

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COLLECTIVE DEFENSE OF THE BALTIC STATES: A SOF BEGINNING

Qui desiderat pacem, preparat bellum. Who desires peace should prepare for war”

—Vegetius De Rei Militari III.

The Cold War is over. Russia is weak and corrupt. Her population is advancing in age. It will take many years for this troubled country to get on her feet economically. She is different, certainly less aggressive since the collapse of the Soviet empire – no longer a threat to the West. There is no turning back to the cold war. These observations from Western politicians about the current situation in Europe are frequently heard in Baltic countries and other small states. Perhaps such simplifications reflect a “realpolitik” posture. On the other hand, they may result from shortsighted political calculations – or from simple-minded miscalculations. Regardless of whichever simplifications might be applicable, Western politicians certainly understand “that a large scale confrontation between United States and Russia, NATO and Russia, and China and Russia would be catastrophic for the international security environment”.¹ This catastrophic confrontation would affect many including the Baltic States.

These Baltic States, along with many former Warsaw Pact states, are fearful of Russia, an expected outcome from their recent post World War II experiences of Soviet terror and atrocities. In addition, it must be understood that Russia’s unique geographic location as a mammoth Eurasian territory, its turbulent history, and its self-imposed isolation from the West during the Soviet era have greatly influenced this country’s attitude and differentiated it from Western culture. Therefore, there should be no surprise that the Russian Federation views the West with anxious suspicion. As the famous Russian sociologist, Eduard Ponarin dramatically stated:

Since the end of the Cold War, Russians have encountered a powerful, alien culture that makes them feel powerless, disadvantaged, and inferior. Globalization has nurtured the emergence of global culture rooted in the North-European Protestant ethics and epitomized by US culture.²

It is perhaps true that the Soviet system will never return: Its ineffectuality has been indisputably exposed. But it also true that Russia has failed to democratize since the collapse of the Soviet Union. As the great Eastern Europe expert, Edward Lucas observed: "The most catastrophic mistake the outside world has made since 1991 is to assume that Russia is steadily becoming a normal country".³ Obviously, during the last twenty years, Russia missed the opportunity to develop into a stable democratic state. Her first President, Boris Yeltsin reformation efforts failed and he handed off a nation in economic chaos to the autocratic Vladimir Putin. This former Russian President and current prime minister has proclaimed that the collapse of the Soviet Union was the greatest geopolitical catastrophe of the 20th century.⁴ As Russia attempts to find a viable way into the new century, a troubled United States is wavering in its leadership of NATO, which was initially formed to confront Soviet aggression and expansionism. Clearly, U.S. interests reside increasingly in the Pacific region, where the 60% of world's population lives and where economic activity is flourishing, unlike in Europe where the economy is stagnating.⁵ The consequences of the U.S. decision to focus on the Pacific region are not yet evident; however, the reduced Washington focus on Europe will clearly open a window of opportunity for Moscow to use its entire means to increase pressure on neighboring countries, NATO, and the EU.

This SRP assesses the ambitions and selected policies of current Russian leader's. It then considers Russia's global role in the current uncertain and complex geostrategic environment. Then it reviews the past and current Baltic military

cooperation. Finally, it recommends the current Baltic States Special Operations Forces (SOF) cooperation as a foundation upon which to build a collective defense of the three Baltic States. The overarching hypothesis proposes that the use of regional multinational special operations units that share outstanding camaraderie, are bound by social and technical networking, and have experience working together in current conflicts can enhance interoperability between Baltic States General-Purpose Forces (GPF). A regional multinational SOF organization would also provide a significant increase in defensive capability for the Baltic's lands and a framework that regional GPF can use to build further defensive capabilities.

Current Russian Policy: Plans and Actions in Baltic's Region

Russian Military Reform. Since the Soviet Union collapsed in 1989, Russia has attempted to re-organize its ineffective post-Soviet military establishment. After ten years of internal turmoil and chaos, newly elected President Putin established a clear vision to revive Russian power and restore Russia's global prestige. He focused on stabilizing the country's economy while reforming and strengthening its military.⁶ In 2006 at a Russian Federation Security Council session, Putin harshly criticized the heads of Russian security forces who had not yet managed to implement Putin's military reform programs. Since that time, Russia has steadily increased her military spending. In 2006, the Russian Ministry of Defense released official statistics about the status of military equipment. According to this data, approximately 50 % of all tanks required major repairs, only 20% of weapons met modern requirements, and only 30% of Russia's fighter planes were combat ready. Moreover, military commanders and the President frequently noted that the country urgently needed to develop modern reconnaissance and communication systems.⁷

Then, the 2008 Russian military invasion into Georgia revealed numerous critical shortfalls in Russia's armed forces. This wake-up call served as the stimulus for increasing military spending and accelerating reform. In 2008, newly elected President Dmitry Medvedev emphasized that the modernization of the Russian armed forces needed to move faster, with greater priority on acquiring advanced weaponry and improving the conditions of service personnel. He also stated that, due to external pressures, the implementation of Russia's military had to be accelerated.⁸ According to Prime Minister Putin, the critical issue of overall reform is modernization of command and control systems. Consequently, on 9 February 2009 the Chief of the Russian General Staff, Gen. Nikolai Makarov, announced that the ongoing military reform would be completed in three or four years. He claimed that the reforms would yield a compact, more mobile, and better-equipped Russian military. During this re-organization, Russia's military end-strength would be downsized to one million personnel, including 150,000 officers.⁹

On 13 May 2009, the Russia released new National Security Strategy. It proclaimed the emergence of Russian "multi-vector diplomacy" throughout the world (thereby implying that U.S. superpower status is eroding). It lauded "Russia's resource potential" which ensured that Russia will "consolidate its influence in the world arena" as a leading political and economic power. It dismissed NATO as an obsolete regional security organization that should be superseded by new regional security architecture. This National Security Strategy ominously proclaims that Russia's military would protect Russian citizens in nearby states.¹⁰

President Medvedev approved the new military strategy on 5 February, 2010. Its pledge to protect Russian citizens abroad reflects a greater emphasis on forward basing in former Soviet republics, which Russia's leaders now regard as a privileged sphere of influence.¹¹ History is replete with examples of Russian leaders playing the "citizen's protection" card. Therefore, Baltic States have every reason to assume that Russian leaders will play this card once again. Consider, for example, Russia's recent invasion of Georgia. Through this campaign, despite its minor flaws, Moscow achieved multiple lucrative goals, both domestically and internationally. First, it reenergized the support of Russian population by showing that Kremlin has the will and ability to protect the citizens abroad. Second, it stifled Georgia's hope to join European community and NATO in the near future. Finally, it showed the world that Russia would not hesitate to employ its crude military power against neighboring country when it thinks it is necessary.¹²

Russia purchased from France, a NATO member, Mistral class ships (two advanced helicopter carriers equipped with a command center and hospital) designed for military landing operations. In December 2010, Lithuania's Minister of defense Rasa Juknevičienė objected to this unprecedented sale of sophisticated assault weaponry to a country generally not considered up to the standards of European democracy.¹³ This Highlights a regional concern and provides evidence of Moscow's efforts to modernize, as she is ready to give up her traditional reliance on domestic military production because she drastically lags behind advanced western technologies. Integration of these ships into the Russian Navy will enable notably enhanced land intervention

operations from the sea. The acquisition of this ability to intervene from the sea puts Baltic security at risk.

These acquisitions and military reforms have enabled Russia to significantly increase its military presence in the Baltic's western Region. Russia has also formed a new Western Command that is more powerful than the Leningrad District ever was. With headquarters in Moscow, Western Command was formed by uniting the Leningrad and Moscow Districts and joining the Baltic and Northern fleets.¹⁴ This new command will control all military personnel and hardware in that region. This re-organization may indicate a more aggressive Russian stance against Europe – especially against neighboring Baltic States.

Russian military exercises in the area have also increased dramatically in frequency and size. These exercises include the Armed Forces of Belarus, which shares Lithuania's longest border. Apparently, they also are conducted in proximity to European Union and NATO members. Joint exercise "Zapad-2009" (West-2009) took place in Russia and Belarus in September 2009, close to the western borders of both states. This exercise involved 12,500 personnel and 200 items of military equipment and hardware from both armies. It was Russia's and Belarus largest scale military exercise since the end of the Cold War. This exercise was officially described as "purely defensive". However, to many Western observers it seemed like a cold war era exercise: Its scenario concentrated on repelling a NATO-led attack on Belarus. An even broader exercise has been planned by both Russia and Belarus for 2013.¹⁵ The Russia - Georgian war affirms that these exercises sometimes evolve to the real wars.¹⁶

Kaliningrad district remains a strongly militarized zone in the Baltic Region. The exact number of military personnel in Kaliningrad is unknown, but there is reason to believe that Russia maintains approximately 20,000 military personnel there. Moscow still regards this enclave as a strategic strong point along the Baltic Sea that blocks NATO expansion. Recently Lithuania and other NATO countries in the region have been clearly concerned about vigorous military activity in this enclave. Moreover, Lithuanian observers suspect that Russia has deployed short-range nuclear missiles there as well.¹⁷

Violations of Baltic States' air space have increased in the last several years. The crash of a Russian Air Force Su-27 jet in Lithuania in 2005, along with numerous "accidental" incursions into NATO air space in this region, raises reasonable concerns.¹⁸ Russian Air Force officials stated that the Russian Air Force will procure over 1,500 new aircraft and significantly increases the number of high precision weapons in its arsenal by 2020. Russia is acquiring such multi-role fighter planes as Su-27SM, Su-30M2 and Su-35S, plus Su-34 fighter-bombers; a number of new attack helicopters such as K-52 and Mi-28N, plus assault helicopters Ka-226 and Ansat-U. Russia is modernizing its strategic aviation and extensively increasing its fleet of Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs). The Russian Air Force received its first four heavy strike fighters Su-34 last year.¹⁹

According to the most recent data, Russia was expected to spend 20% more in 2011 than it did in 2010 on defense. Russia officially declared that their spending on the provision of arms and military equipment would be over 1 trillion rubles (\$30billion) in 2012.²⁰ In the mean time, NATO countries, particular in Europe, are trimming defense

budgets.²¹ Despite Russia's formidable military build-up, Western security assessments since the fall of the Soviet Union have been based on the premise of mutual cooperation between Russia and Europe and the projections of Western strategists that Russian will be less of the threat in the next decade.²² However, the current Russian rearmament and military reform does not portend a threat-free future.

As further proof, the Kremlin's active information operations campaign recently launched via mass media promotes its military reform. It clearly targets two audiences: It assures the domestic audience that its government is providing national security, and it informs the rest of the world that Russia has regained its military muscle and is once again worthy of superpower status.

Economical Policy (Use of Energy Levers: Gas, Oil and Electricity). Moscow's foreign policy is based on Russia's energy resources and its strengthened economy. Moscow's growing ability to use economic leverage in Europe recently became very visible. For example, the Russo-German North Stream gas pipeline under the Baltic Sea bypasses the Baltic States and Poland; it pumps Russian gas directly into the Europe through Germany making it easier to control who gets and who does not get gas. In February 2007, three Baltic States, together with Poland signed an agreement to build a new nuclear power plant (NPP) in Lithuania. Moscow responded quickly: On 27 August 2008, Rosatom (Russia's government- controlled nuclear company) announced its plans to build a NPP close to the Lithuanian border in Kaliningrad.²³ Similarly, the Kremlin's closest ally Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko approved a Russian plan to build another NPP 30 km from the Lithuania border.²⁴ Lithuania believes that these actions are designed to counter the Baltic States regional efforts to gain energy

independence from Moscow.²⁵ Also, being that the Belarusian NPP site is located only 50 km distance from the Lithuanian capital Vilnius, Lithuanians are extremely concerned about the possible adverse effects that the planned NPP might have on the population and the environment of Lithuania.²⁶ In addition to creating concerns about the environment, Russia causes concerns by how it frequently uses its energy resources in its foreign policy. In a dramatic example, Russia cut off its delivery of natural gas to the Ukraine in 2006.²⁷ Similarly, it cut off the oil flow through the Druzhba pipeline to Lithuania's Mažeikiai oil refinery, owned by Poland's PK Orlen Oil Company. This act came after the Lithuanian government refused to sell its national Mažeikiai oil refinery to a Russian company. Russia's officials described this cutoff as a "technical failure". Whatever it was, it has not been fixed: The refinery no longer receives Russian oil.²⁸ Lastly, Russia's purchases of strategic sectors of local Baltic economies are designed to obtain full or partial control over the gas and oil sectors of all transit countries. European silence on these Russian economic maneuvers is deafening. Smaller Baltic States have no assurance that they will not be further victimized by more underwater agreements like the Munich or Molotov – Ribbentrop pacts.

Russia's heavy-handed use of its energy resources is much like USSR cold war tactics. The cold war may have ended, but Russia continues to contribute to East – West tensions. Russia provides western European countries with energy and thereby lulls these nations into a cooperative relationship. However, Russia also uses its energy resources and policies to bully its Baltic neighbors into compliance with Russian interests. Russia, like the USSR, knows how to wield both the carrot and the stick.

Commonwealth of Independent States and Custom Union (CISCU). Plans of foundation of this Union raised many intense discussions and concerns around the world.²⁹ Creation of a single common market of about 170 million people in total with one currency and without the borders, again, affirms Moscow's ambitions to reestablish Russia's dominant influence in the region. In addition, the Commonwealth of Independent States and Custom Union seem like another "candy trap" for the neighboring countries. CISCU clearly challenged EU. As the Russian Prime Minister Putin noted in an Izvestia article:

It took Europe 40 years to move from the European Coal and Steel Community to the full European Union... We see their strengths and weaknesses. And this is our obvious advantage since it means we are in a position to avoid mistakes and unnecessary bureaucratic superstructures.³⁰

CISCU would benefit from EU's mistakes. A successful CISCU would provide Russia with huge economic and political power. Such success would make Russia even more ambitious – and perhaps aggressive.

Russia's policies toward the Baltic States are unlikely to change. Current President D. Medvedev intends to swap jobs with the V. Putin;³¹ this power arrangement will put Russia on an authoritarian path for years to come. There is little doubt that Putin's return to the Kremlin is all but guaranteed.

Finally, recent Russian elections show that the Russian people do not favor Putin's autocracy.³² Nevertheless, Russians tend to vote for nationalist and communist parties, which are even more radical and anti-western than Putin's United Russia party. Results indicate that public support for Putin's party United Russia has declined, but Russian voters favored three radical and nationalist parties: Communists, Liberal democrats led by radical clown Vladimir V. Zhirinovsky, and the center-left, A Just

Russia.³³ In fact, three of the four parties elected to the Parliament regard the Baltic region as the eternal and legal property of Russia. Therefore, it is not unreasonable to conclude that Lithuania and its Baltic neighbors can expect much greater political pressure from Moscow for at least six more years.

What is on the Other Side?

Currently Lithuania's membership in NATO (along with article V guarantees) is unquestionably the foundation for country's stance against Russia. However, dynamic changes in the world, uncertainties, and a reduced United States focus on Europe could encourage Russia to take more aggressive measures against Baltic States in the future.

In Brussels, June 2011, former US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates relentlessly criticized NATO partners for their low military spending and lack of political will to defend them-selves. He urged has European partners to strengthen their own defense, indicating that the United States might be unwilling and unable to guarantee their future security.³⁴ In a similar but softer manner, current Secretary Leon Panetta in his first European speech gently encouraged the partners of alliance "to heed the lessons from the Libya war and cooperate on much-needed defense spending in order not to hollow this alliance".³⁵ Ongoing changes in US global priorities, its military focus to the Asia-Pacific region, and reduction of troops in Europe should hasten a full reconsideration of NATO states' internal and foreign policies. Certainly, Lithuania must consider ways to counter Russian aggression. Since the United States will reduce its European force to only two brigades and the Pentagon suffers from huge reductions in military funding, Lithuania and other small European countries could no longer depend on the U.S. as a guarantor of their security.³⁶

These facts also can encourage Kremlin (who is traditionally exceptionally critical of NATO) to carry on its ambitious plans. Russia has always considered the Baltic States in her sphere of influence; she has never come to terms with their independence. Aware of Russia's deep-rooted traditional imperial policies and with bitter memories of past Russian occupation, Lithuania must seek ways to secure her hard-won independence.

Current globalization processes induce democratic countries to seek closer alliances. Perhaps good-faith cooperation with other democracies could be the way to preserve Baltic's independence and upheld the values of democracy. However, the political, economic, and geo-strategic situation of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania do not lend themselves to good-faith security relationships with countries willing or able to counter Russian aggression. As a consequence, these Baltic States must find more realistic and viable ways to protect themselves from any possible aggression. They must quickly build strong political and military Baltic States alliance to assure their survival in this central European crossroad.

BS Military Development and Cooperation since the Beginning of Independence

The collapse of USSR put the Baltic States into a new unfamiliar and uncertain strategic situation. Certainly, as these states became independent, they immediately sought to rid themselves of Soviet Union power structures and to establish their own national institutions. Despite initial prospect of cordial relations with Russia, several disputes and disagreements quickly surfaced regarding treatment of Russian-speaking minorities, the final status of borders, economical relations, and disposition of Russian armed forces. The complexity and intensity of these issues led these Baltic States to seek security guarantees from the West.³⁷ All three countries began building their own

militaries at almost at the same time. They also sought membership in international organizations.

The Baltic States urgently placed membership in NATO their highest but also most challenging priority. Some of NATO's and other older European democracies, such as Germany and Scandinavian countries, were not eager to welcome former Soviet states into the organization. These countries preferred to provide "soft power" support to the Baltic States, rather than allying themselves as providers of "hard power". For example, German decision-makers advised the Baltic States to abandon desires of NATO membership in the near term. They regarded the Baltic States more as the bridge between West and Russia. They could not conceive of these bridge states as an integral part of Western security system. Further, Sweden and Finland had neither the interest nor the means to afford defense capabilities for them.³⁸ Nevertheless, the Nordic and Baltic governments initiated many regional "soft security" initiatives and invested in specific military means. Scandinavian countries provided remarkable support. Several projects were implemented.

Projects such as the establishment of Baltic Peacekeeping Battalion (BALTBAT), Baltic Air Surveillance Network (BALTNET), Baltic Naval Squadron (BALTRON) and Baltic Defense College (BALTDEFCOL) provide tangible evidence of the Baltic States' efforts in seeking to integrate into the NATO security framework. These defense institutions were established to prepare Baltic military personnel to operate to NATO standards. Nevertheless, later events reveal that these initiatives were insufficient. In mid -1997, NATO enlargement was limited to Poland, Hungary and the Czech Republic. A combination of Russian antagonism and European reluctance had denied the Baltic

States their primary foreign policy objectives – membership in NATO and the EU.³⁹ Only after the active involvement and initiative of the United States and vigorous efforts of the Baltic States in foreign and military policies, were these three states admitted to NATO in 2004.

This membership in NATO, the world's most powerful alliance lulled some Lithuanian and Latvian politicians into a false sense of security. Instead of strengthening their defense, the two countries focused on professionalization of their militaries. Despite a strong recommendation from NATO to spend no less than 2% of their GDP on defense, Lithuanian and Latvian governments only contributed around 1%. According the NATO 2011 Press Release Lithuania's military spending approached only 0.9%, while Latvians invested only 1.0% of their GDP on defense.⁴⁰ Clearly, the recent global financial crises seriously affected the economies of Latvia and Lithuania, forcing their governments to dramatically reduce their defense budgets. In contrast, Estonians managed to fulfill the NATO requirement to allocate 2% of GDP to defense spending in 2012.⁴¹ This serious problem creates disparity in the development of the Baltic States' militaries and friction between their politicians. Therefore, Lithuanian and Latvian political leaders must address this problem quickly and positively.

Nevertheless, the economic crises had positively hastened joint defense procurement among the three Baltic countries which also synchronizing national acquisition plans in order to eliminate differences in armament and equipment contributed by each country.⁴² Moreover, Russia's tangible threat from the East clearly pushes the three Baltic countries to seek rapid solutions in cooperative regional defense. Beside positive strategic efforts to build a collective defense, more has to be

done at the operational and tactical levels. On 2 December 2011, defense ministers of Lithuania, Latvia, and Estonia announced new defense cooperation initiatives designed to increase and enhance military cooperation among them. One of the initiatives proposes collective formation of contingents for standby in the NATO Response Force. In addition, the Baltic defense ministers expressed their support for closer cooperation between the Special Operations Forces of Latvia and Lithuania.⁴³ Both decisions represent very positive steps forward in building a regional military capability. More significantly, these initiatives open the window of opportunity for the development of a Baltic armed force. They certainly clear the way for the cooperation between Baltic Special Operations Forces. Besides having larger and more capable Special Operations Forces, building a collective SOF capacity could serve as the initial step in organizing and structuring a collective Baltic defense force.

Why Special Operations Forces?

Experience plays a very important role in every human life. Combat experience, active participation in international missions, and contact with other cultures and nations splendidly prepares soldiers to interact with allies from other countries. Having specially selected and trained SOF troopers with these experiences has additional synergy as these soldiers are by their nature extremely receptive and adaptive to operating in a complex and uncertain environment. Two of these complex environments fall within primary SOF missions. These are Foreign Internal Defense (FID – train, advise, and assist host nation military, paramilitary, and on occasion, civilian forces in support of programs designed to free and protect a society from subversion, lawlessness, and insurgency)⁴⁴ and Military Assistance (MA – broad spectrum of measures in support of friendly forces throughout the spectrum of conflict).⁴⁵ It is in these mission areas that

SOF units acquire cultural awareness through teaching and instructing of indigenous forces. Additionally, SOF's constant involvement in combat operations and experience in international military operations (Iraq and International Security and Assistance Force ISAF in Afghanistan for example) develop invaluable competence which can be used in collective actions with other nations. NATO SOF doctrine claims: "They can contribute directly to enhance mutual cooperation, provide early identification and assessment of the crisis, train friendly forces, and develop military liaison."⁴⁶

Likewise, SOF internalizes jointness of the military services. The U.S. Joint Publication 3-05 emphasizes that: "SOF are inherently joint. SOF regularly conducts joint and combined training, both within Special Operations Forces community and with Conventional Forces... Additionally, SOF routinely operates closely with other governmental agencies (OGA's), intergovernmental organizations (IGO's), nongovernmental organizations (NGO's), and other nation's forces."⁴⁷ SOF abilities are especially useful in today's battlefields where precision and clockwork synchronization are vital. Nevertheless, given the reality that SOF units are small in size and numbers, they rarely wage wars alone. In operations, they often are dependent the larger GPF's capabilities, platforms, or intelligence. Additionally, to maintain perishable critical skills SOF has to continuous drill and exercise together with other Forces and agencies. For the GPF to achieve the required synchronization and successfully accomplish these joint operations, SOF plays a significant role as both a synchronizer and force multiplier.

Finally and most importantly, having a SOF capability requires a relatively small expenditure of total defense cost. According the NATO Special Operations Coordination Center (NSCC) assessment the price of training and equipping domestic SOF

comparing with operating cost of expensive Air and Naval forces acquisition is much lower and enables a significant strategic capability.⁴⁸

All facts mentioned above, provide ample support to the continued development of national SOF capabilities whereas and more importantly encourage similar trilateral cooperation between national GPF of the Baltic States.

SOF as an Example of Multinational Interoperability

The Past. Military history is filled with the positive examples of special units composed of soldiers from different nationalities who worked together successfully. The U. S. Office of Strategic Service, established on 23 June 1942, was a predecessor of Central Intelligence Agency (CIA). Its primary mission was defined loosely as intelligence gathering and waging unconventional warfare. Nevertheless, this organization had authorization to carry out a broad spectrum of activities including propaganda, sabotage, guerilla warfare, subversion, espionage, and many others.⁴⁹ In 1943, OSS implemented another project: It would create so-called Operational Groups. These groups were formed from the highly trained uniformed soldiers formed into special operations units that were able to operate independently behind enemy lines to conducting sabotage against Axis forces.⁵⁰ These groups were often made up of soldiers from different nations. For example, the OSS Norwegian Special Operations Group consisted of stranded Norwegian seamen and Americans of Scandinavian descent (with a few Irishmen thrown in)⁵¹ and the 4th Special Forces Group consisted of 66 French speaking British and American personnel.⁵²

The legendary First Special Service Force, also known as the “Devils brigade” was a joint American – Canadian unit activated on 19 July 1942. This unit was the inspiration of British scientist Geoffrey Pyke’s vision to create a small, elite military force

capable of fighting behind enemy lines in winter in a mountainous condition. Likewise, the British Combined Operations Commando units tormented the Germans.⁵³ 50% of this unit consisted of Canadians while another 50% consisted of U.S. troopers.

One of the British Combined Operations units was 14 Commando. It was formed at the end of 1942, received sub-arctic training, specialized in raiding Norway in kayaks and consisted of British, Canadians, North American Indians (Natives) plus members of the US 2 Ranger Battalion and Norwegians as guides. 14th Commando was part of "North Force" which consisted of 10, 12 and 14 Commandos.⁵⁴

All these multinational units proved their effectiveness in a number of extremely successful operations. Indeed, their outstanding examples laid the foundations for some of today's SOF mission areas. Most importantly, the ability to work within a multinational and multicultural environment illustrates that formidable flexibility of SOF. Their success affirms that different cultures, language and nationalities are not barriers among the soldiers facing common threats or fighting for the same goals.

Today. At the 2006 Riga Summit, NATO members endorsed the establishment of the NATO Special Operations Coordination Center. Subsequently, the NATO Special Operations Headquarters (NSHQ) opened in November 2010. The Headquarters' primary mission is to direct and coordinate all NATO Special Operations-related activities. It is responsible for comprehensive NATO SOF policy, doctrines, standards, education, and assessments. In addition, NSHQ is directed to "maintain and develop a robust C4I (Command, control, communications, computers, and intelligence) capability equipped with organic SOF enablers to ensure interoperability and enhance employment of NATO Special Operations."⁵⁵ The establishment of NSHQ represents a

huge step toward interoperability and mutual understanding among different nations that are joined in the SOF brotherhood. Moreover, the establishment of NSHQ has encouraged other alliance members to boost their investments in their own Special Operation Forces. Noticeably, the establishment of this headquarters highlights the recognition of the importance and professionalism of Special Operations Forces by the member nations. Additionally, NATO leaders have encouraged cooperation among member's states SOF units. Finally, this NSHQ initiative has encouraged the development of SOF units in other NATO countries and has standardized Special Operations Forces training and acquisition among NATO partners.

Lithuanian and Latvian SOF cooperation also provides an excellent example of such cooperation. Lithuania has provided a Special Operations Task Force in southern Afghanistan since the mid-2007. A Latvian SOF contingent joined the Lithuanian Task Group "Aitvaras" by the end of the 2011. For the first time, these two Baltic States fielded a joint multinational SOF Task Force. This decision to deploy combined Lithuanian - Latvian force was made on August 2011 under a Memorandum of Understanding between both countries' Defense Chiefs of Staff. Significantly, both Commanders emphasized the importance of full and essential cooperation between both countries.⁵⁶ In remote Afghanistan, a combined Lithuanian and Latvian Special Operations Task Force launched the potential for a collective defense of the Baltic's.

Conclusions

The world today remains extremely volatile and fussy. Furthermore, as the economies and societies integrate, our world affected by these processes of globalization, changes rapidly. Unfortunately, not all of that change is good. Given that military power remains one of the most important tools in implementing policies around

the globe and often serves as a primary instrument in deterrence, the Baltic States' militaries must be rapidly integrated into a collective defense force in order to deal with the emerging threat from Russia. Therefore, Baltic leaders must swiftly address current disparities in the Baltic States' military spending. Hence, despite current fiscal problems, political leaders in Latvia and Lithuania must also find ways to maintain the current size of their militaries and gradually increase their defense budgets.

In addition to increasing spending and matching military budgets, Baltic strategic leaders must try to take the unique abilities and cultural adaptability of SOF and export it to benefit the security of the entire Baltic region. These leaders must also consider the cooperative capacity of Baltic Special Operations Forces as a vehicle through which the three country's militaries could eventually integrate into a common defense system. Furthermore, Baltic leaders must recognize that the experience gained by SOF troopers in recent combat engagements with the enemy during international missions contributes to their value as deterrents. Eventually, SOF soldiers can share their cooperation knowledge and experience with conventional forces. All these can serve as initial steps in building a collective defense. Integration of Lithuanian, Latvian, and Estonian SOF paves the way for comprehensive integrations, including common acquisition and total interoperability of a Baltic Defense Forces.

SOF's capability as a force multiplier must be further exploited. Synchronized Baltic States Special Operations Forces operating in concert with conventional forces will enable Baltic's militaries to enjoy the stronger defense capabilities and combat effectiveness.

Lithuanian – Latvian SOF units have integrated into one Task Force and deployed to a combat zone. Estonia should consider making this a tripartite force. Unfortunately, Estonia has maintained strict secrecy regarding its SOF capabilities, which limits cooperation opportunities. Estonian leaders should acknowledge that there is strength in numbers and thus increase the joint Baltic SOF team by another critical member.

Finally, the creation of a strong Baltic SOF collective force could serve as a leading example and open further ways for greater teamwork within the Nordic - Baltic region (So called NB 8: 5 Nordic countries - Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Iceland, plus 3 Baltic States - Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania)⁵⁷ toward strategic military integration. After these three nations integrate their efforts in collective defense, other states from Nordic - Baltic region would be more willing to support this collective effort.

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